

Medical Sociology 2017 :GROWING UP, GROWING OLD: MOVING THROUGH THE LIFE COURSE WITH CHILDHOOD PARALYTIC POLIO

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Short Communication

Abstract

More and more individuals with childhood impairments are moving into older life, and defying previous medical prognosis that they will not survive that long. Their experiences and performance of life course roles in education, employment, marriage, parenthood and retirement are shaped by the social impact of living with impairment and interacting with policies, institutions and cultural environments in ways that are different to people who acquire impairments in later life. Further, despite assumptions that their impairments will remain static, it is expected that this cohort will acquire comorbid and secondary impairments as they age in a disabling society, and encounter 'barriers to being' as well as 'barriers to doing' (Thomas, 1999). This will inevitably add to the complexity and cost of healthcare, and need for additional resources. Thus further exploration is required for design and implementation of specific intervention that treat patients across the lifespan, as opposed to when they are within a particular generational location. Both, scholars and service professionals, recognize the constraints of age-specific boundaries and the benefit of adopting a life course lens to understand how onset of impairments at particular times of life are related and contribute to each other. An example is childhood paralytic poliomyelitis and post-polio syndrome. This paper draws on the life histories of survivors of paralytic poliomyelitis to understand how the interplay of individual biography and social structures shape experiences of people with childhood impairments as they occupy different generational stages across the life course, and how disability impacts life events, relationships and choices at each stage. The approach can be useful to understand the cumulative effects of childhood impairment as disabled people move through biographical and historical time.

Biography

Sonali Shah adopts qualitative methods to explore the social inclusion and social equity for disabled people across the life course and intersectional identities - ages, genders and ethnicities. A key concern of her research is to ensure the voices of historically marginalised and oppressed populations are listened to and included in policies and practices that affect their well-being and participation in society.